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SUBJECT: THESSALONIKI: PROPOSAL FOR BALKAN - EASTERN MED
ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION

11. SUMMARY: The Thessaloniki-based Balkan Environment Center would like to initiate cooperation on water management and renewable energy with the northern Israel-based Galilee Society, beginning with a video-teleconference discussion with scientists from both organizations on Earth Day, April 22. ConGen Thess is prepared to host and co-organize the teleconference on the Greek side with the Balkan Environment Center, and would appreciate Embassy Tel Aviv's advice and assistance, if necessary, on the participation of the Galilee Society scientists in the teleconference. The goal of the teleconference would be to explore areas for practical cooperation and plan next steps, including a working visit to the Balkan Center. The Balkan Center receives EU and Greek government funding and believes there are opportunities for attracting EU financial support for Balkan - Eastern Med cooperation. END SUMMARY

12. During an October 10, 2008 visit to Thessaloniki by EUR DAS Graffey, the Thessaloniki-based NGO Balkan Environment Center agreed to work with the USG to develop projects that promote scientific and practical cooperation on environmental issues with counterparts facing similar challenges in southeast Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. As follow up, Post is working with the Balkan Environment Center on projects in northern Greece and neighboring countries facing similar environmental challenges. Post has also developed with the Center's director, Aristotle University professor George Zalidis, and University of South Florida scientist Tom Crisman a proposal for reaching out to potential partners in the Eastern Med, specifically Israel. In December 2008, the Center's director, Aristotle University professor George Zalidis, attended a workshop on water re-use organized by the U.S.-Israel Binational Science Foundation (BSF). Based on the workshop and discussions on the margins, Crisman (who is a member of the BSF) and Zalidis believe Israel and Greece share a number of environmental challenges and have the potential to become regional hubs for the exchange of information, best practices and commercial solutions.

Proposed Balkan - Eastern Mediterranean Linkage and Network

13. Zalidis and Crisman are willing to help develop linkages between the Balkan Center and scientists they met at the workshop from the Galilee Society, which, according to its website is "the Arab National Society for Health Research and Services [which] strives to achieve equitable health, environmental and socio-economic conditions for Palestinian Arabs in Israel" based in Shefa-Amr, northern Israel. The Society focuses on community/municipality engagement, water management and product development. Zalidis and Crisman believe there is a natural affinity between the Galilee Society and the Balkan Center that could be developed to promote water management best practices, technology transfer and product development in the Balkans and Eastern Med. They envision the Balkan Center continuing to foster cooperation among

environmental NGOs and municipalities throughout the Balkans, and the Galilee Society doing the same with Arab municipalities and organizations within Israel and neighboring Arab states. Together, the two organizations would build a broad Eastern Mediterranean Network to coordinate programs. Crisman and his colleagues at the University of South Florida are willing to play an advisory role. According to Zalidis, whose Balkan Center receives support from the Greek government and European Union, a significant amount of EU funding is available for the promotion of regional cooperation on water management and other environmental issues. They are not seeking USG funding for this initiative.

Earth Day Three-way Video Teleconference - April 22

14. As a next step, ConGen Thess would like to organize a three-way digital video conference call between scientists from the Balkan Environment Center, Galilee Society and the University of South Florida on April 22, Earth Day, on possible cooperation in the area of water management. The purpose would be to help establish a working relationship and identify topics of mutual interest. Likely areas of interest are water management and re-use, designing with nature for waste treatment, research and business development potential around ongoing work at both centers on use of organic wastes from olive oil processing as a biofuel, and the general topic of engaging local communities and municipalities in the organizations' projects/activities. According to Zalidis and Crisman, the latter topic is especially promising as both the Balkan Center and Galilee Society are committed to a bottom-up approach to problem identification, solution and policy development, and have formally engaged local municipalities as part of their administrative structure to ensure this. They believe that this

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could be a model throughout the Balkans and the Middle East. The expected outcomes from this phone conference are agreement on working cooperatively and a general approach for the next step in the process, a workshop at either the Balkan Center or Galilee Society around a key interest area for joint research.

World Environment Day Workshop - 5 June

15. If the April 22 DVC is successful, the next step would be a workshop that would focus on one or two research topics that appear to be "low hanging fruit" likely leading to immediate funding opportunities. It is expected that the workshop would lead to near-term proposals for submission to the EU and other clearly identified funding sources. Fleshing out proposals would be a main goal of the workshop. In addition, if funding (from EU or Greek Government sources) permits, the workshop could also bring together representatives from communities/municipalities from Greece and Israel to establish linkages and exchange experiences. This section of the workshop could be opened to a broader audience, in part to show how this kind of activity can lead to problem identification, solution and dissemination of ideas through the two scientific organizations and the proposed Eastern Med network.

16. Post apologizes for the short notice, but would be grateful for feedback from Embassy Tel Aviv on the feasibility of this proposal. If Tel Aviv agrees, we would also welcome the Embassy's hosting of the DVC from Israel, if the Galilee Society does not have its own DVC equipment. OES/STC and OES/ENV have reviewed and cleared this proposal. Thessaloniki point of contact is George Pelargidis, pelargidisg@state.gov
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